Journal of Islamic World and Politics
Vol. 9 No. 2 December 2025
https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v9i2.212

The Impact of Yemen's Proxy War on Geopolitics in the Middle East 2015-2023

Ida Susilowati
Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia
Email: idasusilowati@unida.gontor.ac.id

Sheilavia Nur Rizqita
Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia
Email: sheilavianurrizqita79@student.hi.unida.gontor.ac.id

Rudi Candra
Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia
Email: rudicandra@unida.gontor.ac.id

Received: June 23th, 2025; Revised: September 17th, 2025; Accepted: December 4th, 2025

Abstract
Yemen's strategic position in the region has led to the escalation of its internal conflict into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This study aims to analyze the impact of Yemen's proxy war on Middle East geopolitics from 2015 to 2023, employing a qualitative descriptive content analysis with a regional geopolitical approach, informed by literature study techniques in data collection. The results showed that the proxy war in Yemen has impacted Middle Eastern geopolitics, particularly in the security and economic sectors. Iran's support for the Houthis militia has prompted responses from other regional countries based on their respective interests. The intensity of Houthi attacks on Yemen's border areas has also created border insecurity and increased tensions between countries in the region. Meanwhile, in the economic and trade sectors, the proxy war in Yemen has resulted in increased operational tariffs on regional trade, forcing countries to adjust their economic policies. This study reinforces the notion that a country's geographic position influences the geopolitics of the surrounding region and has the potential to create a domino effect on regional political instability, as seen in the conflict in Yemen.

Keywords: Middle East Geopolitics; Yemen Proxy war; Regional instability; Houthis

Abstrak

Posisi strategis Yaman di kawasan menjadikan konflik internal di negaranya meningkat menjadi perang proksi antara Arab Saudi dan Iran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak Proxy War Yaman terhadap Geopolitik di Timur Tengah 2015-2023, dengan menggunakan metode analisa konten deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan geopolitik kawasan berdasarkan tehnik studi pustaka dalam pengumpulan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, bahwa Proxy War di Yaman berdampak terhadap geopolitik Timur Tengah, khususnya di bidang keamanan dan ekonomi. Dukungan Iran terhadap milisi Houthi memunculkan respon negara-negara kawasan lainnya berdasarkan kepentingan masing-masing negara. Intensitas serangan Houthi di daerah perbatasan Yaman juga menciptakan insekuritas kawasan perbatasan dan meningkatkan ketegangan antar negara-negara di kawasan. Sementara di bidang ekonomi dan perdagangan, proxy war di Yaman berdampak pada kenaikan tarif operasional perdagangan kawasan yang menyebabkan negara-negara kawasan perlu menyesuaikan kebijakan perekonomian mereka. Penelitian ini menguatkan asumsi, bahwa posisi geografis negara berdampak terhadap geopolitik kawasan sekitarnya dan berpotensi memunculkan

efek domino terhadap instabilitas politik kawasan sekitarnya, sebagaimana yang terjadi dalam konflik di Yaman.

Kata Kunci: *Geopolitik Timur Tengah; Proxy war Yaman; Instabilitas kawasan; Houthis*

INTRODUCTION

Following the coup of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi by the Houthis in 2014, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi fled to the city of Aden. He sent a letter to the Saudi Arabian government to help restore his power in Yemen (Presiden Yaman Tinggalkan Istana di Kota Aden, 2015). Intervention from foreign countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, in the Yemen conflict cannot be separated from interests in the fields of security, territorial expansion, exploitation of natural resources, and geopolitics (Nurhakim, 2022). This situation has increased the intensity of the proxy war in Yemen because in 2015, Saudi Arabia and its coalition carried out airstrikes against the Houthis rebels.

The proxy war in Yemen is inseparable from the bipolarity of the ideological and geopolitical system in the Middle East, namely between Sunnis and Shiites, through the intervention of Saudi Arabia and Iran. As a major power in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has several interests in its intervention in Yemen, including securitizing Saudi Arabia's border with Yemen, counter-hegemony and balancing of power against Iran's power in the region, and combating Houthi rebels who could potentially threaten Saudi power in Yemen (Karakır, 2018). Meanwhile, Iran provides its support to the Houthis based on several factors, including: gaining access to international trade routes around the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandub Strait, and the Gulf of Aden; counter-hegemony against Saudi Arabia's power in the region; and developing its "Shia Crescent" proxy network in the Middle East (Al-hinaiti, 2023).

In the realist view, foreign intervention is never separate from national interests, whether in the form of direct or indirect support, including funds, weapons, and military training, between parties. The relationship between supporting and supported actors reflects the existence of a proxy war in Yemen, namely between the Iranian government (the supporter) and the Houthis militia (the supported) or between the Saudi Arabian government (the supporter) and the Yemeni government (the supported), as explained by Boda regarding the concept of proxy war (Karakır, 2018). Amos C. Fox's definition of proxy warfare describes it as a situation where two or more actors fight against an enemy to achieve the goals of 'The Principal' (the main country) as the owner of the interests, with 'The Agent' carrying out the orders of the main country (Fox, 2019). In the proxy war in Yemen, Iran is The Principal and the Houthis militia is The Agent, fighting against the Yemeni government as The Agent and the Saudi Arabian government as The Principal.

This study aims to analyze the impact of proxy wars in Yemen on the geopolitics of the Middle East Region, considering Yemen's strategic location, which faces the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Red Sea, as the main routes of international trade in the Region. This study is important to understand that the bipolar system is a phenomenon of the Middle East Regional political system in the form of proxy wars in Yemen that influence geopolitics in the Region, namely between the Sunni Wahabi ideology (Saudi Arabia) and the Shia Imamiyah (Iran) as a balance of power in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been much research on the proxy war in Yemen, from the factors behind its emergence to the actors involved in it. However, none have specifically discussed its impact on Middle East geopolitics. Deby Setiawati, for example, focuses on analyzing the countries involved in the internal conflict in Yemen, including the United States' intervention through its support for Saudi Arabia, which led to the escalation of the conflict into a proxy war (Setiawati et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Sigit Priambodo focuses on analyzing the motives behind Saudi Arabia's intervention in the Yemeni civil conflict, based on Saudi Arabia's national security interests (Priambodo, 2017). Despite this, Mahjoob Zweiri, who focuses on the reasons for Iran's intervention in the internal conflict in Yemen through its support for the Houthis militia (Zweiri, 2016). Sigit and Mahjoob focus on analyzing the motives of the

two countries in intervening in the Yemeni civil war.

Meanwhile, Bassel F. Salloukh focuses on analyzing the geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East, with the US invasion of Iraq as the primary object of analysis, rather than the proxy war in Yemen or the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. (Salloukh, 2013) Unlike Diane M. Zohri, who focuses on analyzing the relationship between the Yemeni proxy war and the shift in global multipolarity and regional instability in general (Zohri, t.t.), meanwhile, this research focuses on how the proxy war in Yemen affects the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East region.

What is interesting is the study by Yahya and Xiaolong which analyzes the strategic geographical location of Yemen which is on the main world trade route, namely the Bab el-Manduub Strait, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea as the reason for the emergence of competition between two major powers in the Middle East, namely between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Koshaimah & Zou, 2023). May Darwich stated that Saudi Arabia's intervention in the Yemen conflict was not for material purposes, but rather to confirm Saudi Arabia's status as a hegemonic country in the region (Darwich, 2018). Conversely, Aneela Khursheed analyzes how Iran intervened in Yemen through its proxy, the Houthis militia, to expand its influence in the region, balancing power against Saudi Arabia and its ally, the United States, through trade issues on maritime routes (Khursheed, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in previous studies by focusing on analyzing the impact of proxy wars in Yemen on the geopolitics of the Middle East region, particularly during the period from 2015 to 2023, when the internal conflict in Yemen escalated into a proxy war arena in the region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Geopolitics is the study of how geographic factors influence international politics and relations between nations, examining the relationship between space and politics (Soepandji, 2020). Geopolitical theory is important for understanding how a country's strategic geographic position can influence regional political dynamics. Geopolitical theory is used to understand how geographic factors, such as Yemen's strategic location, can influence the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East region, particularly in the form of proxy wars.

Karl Haushofer, in his book entitled Bausteine zur Geopolitik, asserts that land and sea play a significant role in a country's geopolitical power. Houshofer adopted several previous thoughts on geopolitics, including those of Sir Halford Mackinder, who emphasized the importance of controlling both land and sea areas. If a threat occurs to either area, it will affect the region's geopolitics, as the land and sea areas of a country cannot be separated. From Rudolf Kjellen, Haushofer adopted the term Autarky or independent economy, which means that a great power must be able to produce everything it needs. Haushofer also adopted Ratzel's idea of Lebensraum or Living Space. Haushofer explains how the political life of a nation is related to its "natural living space," namely the area where people live, which includes natural resources for survival (BAUSTEINE ZUR GEOPOLITIK VON DR KARL HAUSHOFER, t.t.) This explanation is also clarified by Dr. Holger H. Herwig, in an article entitled "Geopolitics: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum" (Herwig, 1999)

Haushofer's geopolitical theory remains relevant for application in the current Middle East geopolitical dynamics. The relevance of the variables in Karl Haushofer's geopolitical theory, namely 'land and sea power, autarky, and lebensraum', is demonstrated through an analysis of the impact of the Proxy War in Yemen on the geopolitics of the Middle East region, which is closely tied to the issue of maritime trade. The Proxy War in Yemen highlights the importance of controlling strategic maritime areas, particularly the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, which are vital routes for global oil trade. Attacks on land and sea areas in the region have an impact on the economies (autarky) of countries in the region due to the disruption of international trade routes in conflict areas, as indicated by the increase in maritime trade tariffs and fluctuations in regional oil imports.

Meanwhile, the concept of "Lebensraum" is reflected in the existence of humanitarian and refugee crises, which underscore the need for improved living space and resources within a country. The increasing number of refugees disrupts the demographic balance of host countries, thus creating social instability in countries in the Middle East. The Yemeni Proxy War is a clear representation of regional geopolitical competition in the fight for control over territory, resources, and regional security within the Haushofer geopolitical framework.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive content analysis method. According to Sugiyono, a descriptive-analytical approach guides researchers in exploring and comprehensively capturing the phenomena of the research object, both broadly and in-depth (Sugiyono, 2019). According to Robert Yin, a descriptive approach is an empirical method for in-depth investigation of contemporary phenomena, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are non-empirical (Bakry, 2019). Therefore, this research employed a case study method to provide a detailed and descriptive understanding of the phenomenon. In this case, the researcher aims to investigate how the dynamics of the relationship and conflict between the supporting countries (Iran and Saudi Arabia) and the supported countries or entities (the Yemeni government and the Houthis) may impact geopolitics in the Middle East, particularly in the region of international maritime trade.

This research employed a literature study data collection technique, utilizing text-based data sources, to illustrate emerging and hidden phenomena behind narratives that require in-depth examination and analysis, better known as data meaning. Researchers, as the primary instrument in qualitative research, analyze data based on phenomena in the field to draw general conclusions, a process known as inductive analysis techniques (Cresswell, 2009), using the dynamics of the proxy war case in Yemen as an example.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Along with the Houthi group's control of Sana'a, the internal conflict in Yemen has escalated due to the intervention of several Gulf countries in the conflict in Yemen, one of which is Saudi Arabia which began its intervention through airstrikes "Operation Decisive Storm" on March 26, 2015 and resulted in approximately 6,592 deaths and 10,470 injuries to civilians (Alotaibi & Eijaz, 2018). Saudi Arabia did not act alone, but was supported by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France in carrying out its intervention. The USA funded $19 billion (Taufiq & Utama, 2018) to Saudi Arabia, and the UK funded £6.8 billion, with the provision of weapons in the form of fighter jets and missiles (Nugraha Hrp, 2018).

The intervention and support from various countries, such as the USA, UK, and France, indicate that the non-international armed conflict in Yemen has escalated into an international armed conflict in the form of a proxy war. In retaliation for the attacks launched by Saudi Arabia in 2015, the Houthis group launched a counter-offensive supported by Iran, namely:

Table 1. Houthi Militia Attacks on Saudi Arabia

Year	Target	Attack
2016 (Tyler Rogoway, 2016)	Saudi Arabian Airport in Thailand	Ballistic missile of the Burkan-1 type
	UAE HSV-2 Swift vessel near Bab el-Mandeb Strait	Anti-ship missile type C-802
2017 (*Qiam-1*, t.t.)	King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh	Burkan-2H type drone
	The Aramco oil company in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia	Burkan-2H type drone
	Mokha port pier (Abdulla & Singh, 2018)	Missile
2018 (Tim Harian Kompas, 2018)	Saudi Arabian tanker ship west of Hudaydah port, Yemen	

Table 1. Houthi Militia Attacks on Saudi Arabia (cont')

Year	Target	Attack
2019	Abha Airport, Saudi Arabia (Ardi Priyatno Utomo, 2019)	Missile
	Aramco oil company in Abqaiq (Tim Harian Kompas, 2019)	Drone (uncrewed aerial vehicle)
2020 (Nevola, 2023)	Al-Jawf Province	Rockets and drones
	Fuel terminal at Jeddah port	
2022 (*Saudi Aramco's Jeddah oil depot hit by Houthi attack | News | Al Jazeera*, t.t.)	The Aramco oil company in Jeddah	Rockets and drones

Source: Processed by researchers from various sources

Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE have escalated the long-running proxy war in Yemen, which has not only impacted Yemen's geopolitics but also regional geopolitics, given Yemen's strategic position on international shipping and trade routes. The armed conflict in Yemen has hampered maritime trade in the region and impacted regional insecurity and the economies of its countries.

The Impact of Yemen's Proxy War on Geopolitics in the Middle East 2015-2023

Yemen's strategic location, situated near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, makes it a focal point for geopolitical competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a vital shipping lane connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, as well as a major international trade route connecting Europe with East Asia. An escalation of the conflict in Yemen has the potential to threaten the security of regional trade routes and affect international oil distribution, influencing geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East from 2015 to 2023.

Land and maritime insecurity in Yemen has resulted in autarky in Yemen and other regional countries. Proxy wars have also triggered humanitarian problems in Yemen and increased the number of Yemeni refugees. The geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, resulting from the outbreak of proxy wars in Yemen, demonstrate the relevance of Hanshoufer's geopolitical theory, which focuses on analyzing several key areas of regional geopolitics: Land and naval power, Autarchy, and Lebensraum.

a. Land and Sea Power

The Proxy War in Yemen has caused insecurity in the Land and Sea Border Areas around Yemen due to the intensity of attacks between the conflicting parties, which has had an impact on geopolitical tensions in regional countries and created political polarity in the region into two dominant powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The numerous attacks on the Saudi Arabian-Yemeni border between 2016 and 2022, as shown by Table 1, have made the region one of the most vulnerable zones in the Middle East. Rocket attacks, mortar fire, and clashes between Saudi forces and Houthi rebels have not only resulted in casualties on both sides but also created prolonged instability. These incidents highlight the vulnerability of the border region, which impacts civilian security. Stabilizing security on the Saudi-Yemeni border requires a structured approach, encompassing military, intelligence, and diplomatic aspects, to minimize civilian casualties.

In 2020-2021, the intensity of maritime attacks by Houthi rebels decreased, as the focus of attacks shifted to public infrastructure. On January 3, 2022, Houthi rebels seized the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-flagged Rawabi ship, carrying medical equipment, and held it for four months before being released in a ceasefire deal (Jacopo & Mazzucco, 2024). The intensity of attacks launched by Houthi rebels in the waters has made many shipping companies reluctant to pass through the trade route. In 2023, several shipping companies implemented a policy of increasing operational costs to anticipate security risks in Yemeni waters, which has an

impact on the economic self-sufficiency of countries in the region.

b. Autarky (Economic Self-Sufficiency)

The Proxy War in Yemen has caused instability in the region's economy, which has a direct impact on several strategic sectors, such as oil. In 2015, several foreign companies, including Total Energies from France, OMV Group from Austria, Hunt Oil Company based in the United States, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Gazprom from Russia, and Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) from South Korea, were affected by this situation. (Hussein & Eryani, 2023) Due to the increasingly vulnerable situation in Sana'a, they stopped their operational activities in Yemen.

Since the beginning of the civil war, the Yemeni economy has declined due to reduced revenue from foreign exports, previously one of the country's mainstays. This decline is evident in the following economic data from Trading Economics, which shows a sharp decline in Yemen's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the past nine years (Yemen - PDB per capita | 1990-2023 Data | 2024-2025 Forecast.

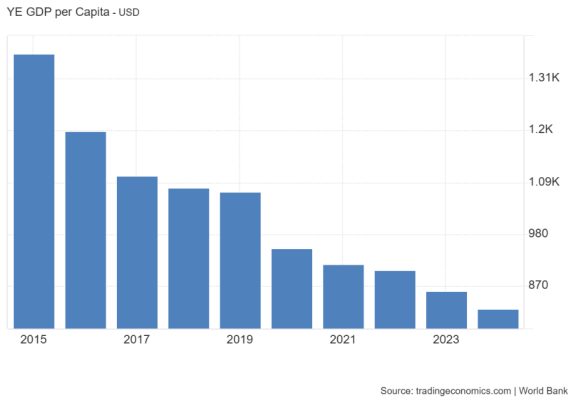

Figure 1. GDP Yaman 2015-2023
Source: tradingeconomics.com

Based on the GDP series (Figure 1), accessed in August 2025, the above data shows that the Yemeni economy has experienced a significant decline over several years due to the proxy war in Yemen (PDB per capita Yemen | 1990-2024 Data | 2025-2027 Perkiraan, 2024). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined from $1.49 trillion in until it reached its lowest figure of $975.71 in 2023. This decline reflects the profound impact of the Yemeni proxy war on the economic sector, which was exacerbated by the weakening of international trade activities, including oil exports. Before the proxy war broke out in 2015, Yemen had a fair amount of economic independence. The proxy war devastated Yemen's economy, leading to a loss of export revenues, increased dependence on foreign aid, and weakened government control over economic resources.

The Houthis largely control oil fields and energy infrastructure, while a naval blockade by the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition further hampers trade routes. Key ports, such as Hudaydah, are blockaded, disrupting imports and exports and exacerbating the economic crisis. In addition, uncontrolled inflation and a sharp depreciation of the Yemeni Rial (YER) have caused prices of necessities to soar. At the same time, the government no longer has foreign exchange reserves to stabilise the economy.

Yemen's proxy war also led to a decline in state revenue, which in turn affected fluctuations in Saudi Arabia's oil export activities in the region. Damage to several oil refinery facilities affected the dynamics of oil shipments to several destination countries for Saudi Arabian oil exports, including Bahrain, Pakistan, Oman, Jordan, Turkey, and Kuwait. Data on fluctuations in the amount of exports can be seen based on the following Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) table: (Saudi Arabia (SAU) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners, t.t.) (Total in Billion USD)

Table 2. Saudi Arabian Oil Exports 2015-2022

Year	Bahrain	Pakistan	Oman	Yordania	Turkey	Kuwait
2015	3.65	1.46	0.004	1.21	0.001	0.002
2016	2.69	0.802	0.018	0.858	0.078	0.004
2017	3.92	1.16	0.045	1	0.226	0.003
2018	5.28	1.7	0.035	1.09	0.072	0.004
2019	4.92	1.26	0.001	0.956	0.002	0.005
2020	2.54	0.693	0.205	0.452	0.016	0.002
2021	10.8	1.88	0.278	0.882	0.03	0.074
2022	0.006	2.77	2.68	1.03	0.332	0.012

Source: OEC World

Table 2 shows that from 2015 to 2022, Saudi Arabia experienced various export dynamics in each destination country. Bahrain is one of the countries with significant fluctuations in its exports. Meanwhile, exports to Pakistan had decreased from $1.46 billion in 2015 and increased again to reach $2.77 billion in 2022. In 2015, Saudi Arabia's oil exports to Oman were only $3.82 million and continued to grow in the following years, reaching a peak of $2.68 billion in 2022. Meanwhile, exports to Jordan were relatively stable, ranging from $800 million to $1.2 billion, except in 2020 when they dropped to $452 million due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, refined oil exports to Turkey showed significant growth, although the value was smaller than that of other countries, from only $1.62 million in 2015. Exports continued to increase to a peak of $332 million in 2022.

Meanwhile, exports to Kuwait remained relatively small, peaking at $74.2 million in 2021 before dropping to $12.4 million in 2022. As a result, Saudi Arabia diversified its oil export market through oil export cooperation with China (Abdulqader, 2023). In early 2023, Yemen's proxy war had not yet ended, despite some mediation by Iraq and Oman in 2021 and a ceasefire by the UN in 2022.

In mid-2023, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached an agreement to normalise diplomatic relations through the Tripartite Joint Statement, which was announced on March 10, 2023, and attended by the Secretary of Iran's National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, Saudi Arabia's National Security Advisor Musaad bin Mohammed Al-Aiban, and China's High Diplomatic Official Wang Yi (Mustofa, 2023). As host to a meeting between top Iranian and Saudi security officials in Beijing, China is acting neutrally as a facilitator between the two countries (Baghernia, 2024). This agreement is an effort to reduce tensions in the Middle East due to the Proxy War in Yemen and to reduce the United States's dominance in the Region. China secures energy and trade routes and increases its diplomatic influence in the Region through its role as a conflict mediator. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has decided to maintain its economic independence by enhancing its air defense system and accelerating its efforts to diversify its economy, thereby reducing its dependence on the oil sector.

The intensity of attacks launched by Houthi rebels in the waters of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea from 2016 to 2022 has forced several shipping companies to change their travel routes in 2023 to cross the Cape of Good Hope, located at the southern tip of the African continent, which is the transition point between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. The Cape of Good Hope has become the leading choice for shipping companies seeking to avoid conflict-ridden routes in the Middle East, despite facing natural challenges such as extreme weather and strong ocean currents. The change in route has resulted in increased shipping rates in the Middle East region.

In 2023, French shipping company Compagnie Maritime d'Affretement-Compagnie Generale Maritime (CMA CGM) and German shipping company Hapag-Lloyd set an additional fee of $1,000 for each 40-foot container unit for shipping routes from Asia to the Mediterranean and North Africa. While for routes from Asia to Northern Europe, three major companies such as Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), Compagnie

Maritime d'Affretement-Compagnie Generale Maritime (CMA CGM), and Hapag-Lloyd set an additional fee of $3,000 for each 40-foot container. Meanwhile, the Israeli shipping company Zim Integrated Shipping Services imposed an additional fee of $3,260 for each 40-foot equivalent unit (FEU). In addition, according to the global shipping platform "Freightos", the sea freight rate for 40-foot containers (FEU) from various ports in China to Israel increased to more than $2,300, or equivalent to Rp. 35.64 million on December 12, 2023, compared to the rate in the previous month, namely November, which was around $1,975 (Israel ketir ketir, biaya pengapalan naik akibat serangan Houthi - ANTARA News, t.t.). The increase in tariffs imposed by several shipping companies underscores the threats and challenges that must be addressed in the waters of the Middle East, particularly in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea.

In the context of autarky, these increased operating costs undermine the ability of regional countries to rely on their trading systems, as some countries rely on foreign military intervention or international cooperation to maintain the security of trade routes. The proxy war in Yemen has led to a decline in the level of economic independence of countries. It has made some countries in the region increasingly vulnerable to external factors in creating financial stability.

c. Lebensraum (Living Space)

In addition to its impact on the economy, the proxy war in Yemen since 2015 has also impacted social and political stability in the Middle East. The proxy war has contributed to a humanitarian crisis in Yemen and led to fluctuations in the number of refugees from Yemen, insecurity, and political instability in the Middle East region.

According to UNHCR data from 2020, as many as 80% of Yemen's entire population requires various forms of assistance, including food, healthcare, and clean water, to survive. Since the escalation of the conflict, several cities in Yemen, such as Aden, Al-Hudaydah, Taiz, and Sana'a, have experienced a severe food crisis due to the blockade by the Houthis and Saudi Arabia of several areas in Yemen. This issue has caused around 90% of food supplies from abroad to be hampered, and only 10% of imported commodities can enter Yemen (Nugraha et al., 2022). As a result, the hunger level among Yemeni citizens increases yearly.

Children in Yemen often do not get enough food. Children aged 6 to 23 months consume only about 1.37 servings of food daily, while those aged 24 to 59 months receive an average of only 2.09 servings per day (Sihaloho et al., 2022). This condition is worsened by the increasing prices of necessities, which are becoming increasingly unaffordable. Most Yemenis rely on food from the market to meet their daily needs, as well as humanitarian aid and local agricultural products, amid the ongoing conflict. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that approximately 12.3 million Yemenis experienced food insecurity in 2015, representing a 15.7% increase since the crisis began. (2015 Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview (Revision) [EN/AR] | OCHA, 2015) and is still increasing, reaching 14.1 million Yemenis experiencing food insecurity in 2016. Meanwhile, from 2017 to 2022, the threat of food insecurity exhibited unstable dynamics, as indicated by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification data, illustrated in the graph below (Yemen | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, t.t.).

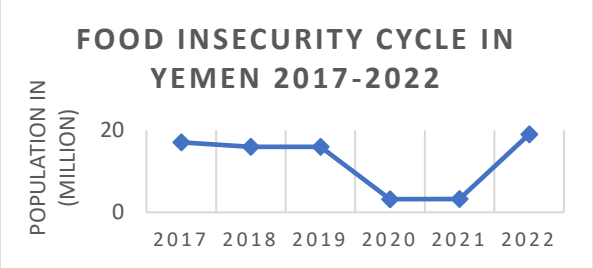

Figure 2. Food Insecurity Data Analysis
Source: IPC Analysis Portal

Figure 2 shows that around 17 million Yemenis experienced food insecurity in 2017, and in 2022, the number of food-insecure people soared to 19 million. In 2023, it was recorded that around 100,000 children in Hudaydah were experiencing acute malnutrition, while in the city of Aden, around 7,700 children faced malnutrition problems. Only around 24% of the

total population of children under 2 years old feel the fulfilment of their breast milk needs due to mothers who lack adequate food intake. On the other hand, the value of the Yemeni Rial (YER) currency has decreased, from 250 YER per $1 to 800 YER per $1 (Volatility of the Yemeni Ri.

The sharp decline in the riyal exchange rate has impacted the economic and social sectors of the Yemeni people, especially in meeting the need for food, whose prices are increasing. In addition to the food crisis, Yemen has also experienced a water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) crisis since 2018, which has significantly impacted agriculture, a source of livelihood for the Yemeni people. The number of Yemenis experiencing a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) crisis is shown in the following data: Conflict and Economic Crisis Drive Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Yemen.

Table 3. Number of Yemenis affected by Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Crisis 2018-2023

Years	Population (Millions)
2018	16
2019	17,8
2020	20,1
2021	8,8
2022	6,6
2023	3,7

According to UNICEF data (Table 2), approximately 16 million Yemenis required water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in 2018. In 2019, the number of people requiring water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services increased to 17.8 million. In 2020, 20.1 million people faced a crisis related to clean water and health. During the conflict in Yemen, it is estimated that there were only 10 health workers to treat 10,000 people with minimal medical equipment, resulting in a death rate of 27% due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of health facilities to treat these diseases (Alsabri et al., 2022). In 2021, 8.8 million people required access to basic clean water and hygiene services. Entering 2022, the number dropped to 6.6 million people; in 2023, it decreased to 3.7 million. This decrease in numbers demonstrates the success of the assistance, most of which was provided by UNICEF. This condition shows the significance of the impact of proxy wars on the lives of the Yemeni people.

The humanitarian crisis experienced by the Yemeni people has pushed them to seek protection and flee to several Middle Eastern countries. Since March 26, 2015, the conflict in Yemen has paralysed commercial air transportation, causing thousands of people to lose access to leave or return to their homeland. At the beginning of the escalation of the conflict in 2015, tens of thousands of Yemenis fled to Somalia and Djibouti. The number of refugees is presented in the report of the International Organization for Migration, as shown in the following graph: (*Over 20,000 Migrants and Refugees Arrive in Horn of Africa from Yemen | International Organization for Migration*, t.t.).

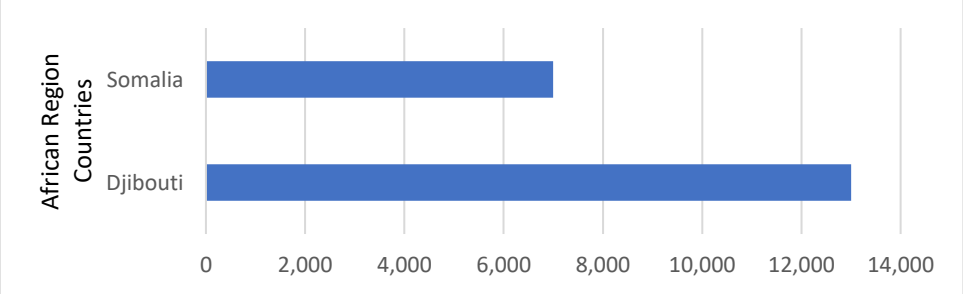

Figure 3. Analysis of Yemeni Refugee Data in African Countries
Source: (IOM,2015)

According to Figure 3, it was recorded that 13,000 Yemenis were in Djibouti and more than 7,000 were in Somalia in 2015. Yemenis crossed various ports in Somaliland and Puntland because the two countries are close to Yemen and easily accessible by sea. In the same year, 3,183 Yemeni asylum seekers and 47 official refugees were in Jordan. Meanwhile, in 2016, 1,144 Yemenis were recorded in Sudan, and 30,000 others fled to Saudi Arabia. In 2017, there were 8,951 asylum seekers and 494 refugees; in 2018, the number increased to 13,835 asylum seekers and 642 refugees; and in 2019, it continued to rise to 14,115 asylum seekers and 715 refugees, primarily from Yemen, in Jordan. At the end of 2019, the Jordanian government requested that UNHCR halt the registration process for new asylum seekers (Al-Majali, 2022), resulting in many Yemenis losing the opportunity to register as asylum seekers in Jordan.

The United Nations (UN) also recorded that 1,248,711 Yemeni immigrants fled to several other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, where as many as 750,919 people, in the United Arab Emirates, as many as 202,574 people, in Kuwait, as many as 68,962 people, and in Qatar, as many as 35,574 people in 2019. As a supporter of Yemen, Saudi Arabia launched a humanitarian initiative by opening opportunities for Yemenis who fled to its country to settle and gain legal status in its territory. The program has provided significant benefits to 400,000 Yemeni refugees, including health services, decent education, and job opportunities to fulfil their living needs (Lysa, 2023).

In 2020, there were 10,000 Yemeni refugees in Iraq, 7,700 in Egypt, and 27,000 in Sudan. In 2021, it was recorded that 3,856 Yemenis sought protection in several European countries, including the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Human Development, t.t.). In 2022, there were 163 refugees and 7,900 Yemeni asylum seekers in Egypt. In 2023, the International Organisation for Migration reported that 27,078 Yemeni refugees returned to their country, as they felt that the situation in Yemen was improving following China's reconciliation. The dynamics of the refugee movement of Yemenis to various countries in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East illustrate the struggle of Yemenis affected by the proxy war to seek a better life (lebensraum).

Middle East Geopolitics 2015-2023 Post-Proxy War in Yemen

Conflicts in the Middle East are often related to identity-based issues colored by sectarianism between the Sunni and Shiite sects. One example of Sunni-Shiite tension is between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which are involved in the Yemeni conflict. Saudi Arabia emerged as a supporter of the legitimate government of Yemen, which is predominantly Sunni, while Iran emerged as a supporter of the Houthis rebels, which are predominantly Shiite (Rahman, 2019).

Uncertainty occurs in the proxy war of Yemen, where Qatar, which was initially part of the Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates coalition supporting the Yemeni government, has diplomatic and economic relations with Iran. Tensions increased in 2016, because Qatar criticised the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in terms of military intervention in Yemen, which culminated in the coalition of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates simultaneously severing diplomatic relations and closing air, sea and land routes to Qatar on June 5, 2017 (Ahmadi & Aditya, 2021). Qatar is accused of supporting terrorism because of its closeness to Iran and using Al-Jazeera media to release news about the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which is considered an ally of Iran. The Saudi Arabian blockade of Qatar has created obstacles to fulfilling Qatar's needs, as 40% of Qatar's food imports come from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, specifically Dubai. Facing the Saudi Arabian blockade, Qatar agreed to use Iranian air routes to stabilize its needs from other countries, by paying as much as $100 million per year to Iran (Ahmad & Al-Hashami, 2023). This situation highlights the political tensions in the Middle East region, which affect the exports, imports, and basic needs of countries in the region.

Tensions arose between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from 2018 to 2019. The two countries' alliance to counter Iran's influence in the region clashed with differences in interests and strategies in the Yemen conflict (Van Slooten, 2019). Saudi Arabia continues to support Yemen's central government, led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. At the same time, the United Arab Emirates has begun supporting the Southern Transitional Council (STC), a separatist group seeking individual independence for southern Yemen. Tensions escalated when the UAE decided to withdraw most of its troops from Yemen in mid-2019. This move is considered a strategy to reduce involvement in a conflict regarded as unwinnable. This split shows that the strategic alliance of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is no longer aligned, thus providing a gap for Iran to intervene in the Middle East region in expanding its Shi'ite ideology.

Although the attacks began to subside in 2020, insecurity and instability remained in the Middle East region due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The country that experienced destruction after the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the proxy war. Only a few hospitals were functioning, and flight access was closed, further exacerbating Yemen's humanitarian crisis (Al-Waleedi et al., 2020). In 2021, Human Rights Watch reported that the Houthis were withholding information about the risks and impacts of COVID-19 in areas under their control. This action hindered the WHO's ability to distribute vaccines to several areas, including Sana'a, Sa'ada, and Al-Hudaydah, making it even more challenging to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the beginning of the Yemeni conflict, Oman has taken a neutral stance in the proxy war in Yemen. Tensions in the conflict arose between Oman and Saudi Arabia in 2022, when Oman was accused of being a conduit for supplying weapons to the Houthis. The UN reported that weapons smuggled from Oman's Jask port were made in Russia, China, and Iran. After reconciliation with China in 2023, a long-term peace agreement was reached between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, but it did not end the conflict. The proxy war in Yemen, involving several foreign actors, has not only escalated the political polarity of the balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East, as two major regional powers, but has also impacted the global political polarity between the United States and China. It is evident in the dynamics of alliances formed from regional political dualism and the persistence of global political power dualism. The Yemeni proxy war demonstrates how Yemen's strategic position influences geopolitics in the Middle East, leading to political uncertainty based on political interests and ideologies among Middle Eastern countries.

CONCLUSION

Yemen's strategic position in the world maritime trade area (the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden), has led many countries to intervene in the internal conflict in Yemen, thus creating a proxy war involving two major powers in the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, which has an impact on the geopolitics of the Middle East region. The Yemeni Proxy War has had an impact on Middle Eastern geopolitics, such as border insecurity due to the intensity of armed attacks between the Houthis militia and Saudi Arabia, creating tensions between regional countries, as indicated by the split in the alliance between Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE in supporting the Yemeni government. The proxy war in Yemen has also contributed to economic instability, primarily due to increased maritime trade costs and fluctuations in the region's trade, which is largely based on oil exports. It has prompted Saudi Arabia's geopolitical shift to diversify its oil exports, including to China. Yemeni border insecurity due to the proxy war has also resulted in a humanitarian crisis and increased the number of refugees from Yemen to regional countries, which has created new problems for regional countries in accepting refugees. These developments have created geopolitical uncertainty in the Middle East due to differences in state interests regarding intervention in Yemen.

REFERENCES

2015 Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview (Revision) [EN/AR] | OCHA. (2015, Juni 12). https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/yemen/2015-yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-revision-enar

Abdulla, K. A., & Singh, J. S. H. (2018). The Influence of Geography in Asymmetric Conflicts in Narrow Seas and the Houthi Insurgency in Yemen. *MJIR| Malaysian Journal of International Relations, 6*(1), 84–90. https://doi.org/10.22452/mjir.vol6no1.7

Abdulqader, Z. M. (2023). Yemen In the Chinese Strategy. *كتاب وقائع املؤمتر الدويلسابع: االجتاهات البحثية احلديثة يف العلوم االنسانية واالجتامعية, .,* 599–611.

Ahmad, S. Y., & Al-Hashami, M. S. (2023). POLITICAL ASSESSMENT OF QATARI CRISIS ON THE GCC SECURITY. *JWP (Jurnal Wacana Politik), 8*(1), 123. https://doi.org/10.24198/jwp.v8i1.42503

Ahmadi, S., & Aditya, M. A. (2021). Relasi Qatar dengan Ikhwanul Muslimin dalam Kerangka Nested Power. Politea, 4(2), 254. https://doi.org/10.21043/politea.v4i2.12350

Al-hinaiti, R., & Ahmad, R. (2023). The Impact of Foreign Intervention in the Yemeni Crisis (2015-2020). *Dirasat: Human & Social Sciences, 50*(6). https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i6.2597

Alotaibi, N. N., & Eijaz, A. (2018). Framing of' Operation Decisive Storm'and Saudi e-press. *J. Pol. Stud., 25,* 69.

Alsabri, M., Alsakkaf, L., Alhadheri, A., Cole, J., & Burkle Jr., F. (2022). Chronic Health Crises and Emergency Medicine in War-torn Yemen, Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine, 23*(2), 280–281. https://doi.org/10.5811/westjem.2021.10.51926

Al-Waleedi, A. A., Naiene, J. D., Thabet, A. A. K., Dandarawe, A., Salem, H., Mohammed, N., Al Noban, M., Bin-Azoon, N. S., Shawqi, A., Rajamanar, M., Al-Jariri, R., Al Hyubaishi, M., Khanbari, L., Thabit, N., Obaid, B., Baaees, M., Assaf, D., Senga, M., Bashir, I. M., … Musani, A. (2020). The first 2 months of the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic in Yemen: Analysis of the surveillance data. *PLOS ONE, 15*(10), e0241260. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0241260

Ardi Priyatno Utomo. (2019, Juni 12). *Houthi Serang Bandara Saudi, 26 Orang Terluka.*

Baghernia, N. (2024). China's Marginal Involvement in The 2023 Iran-Saudi Arabia Reconciliation. *Asian Affairs, 55*(1), 41–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2024.2329615

BAUSTEINE ZUR GEOPOLITIK VON DR KARL HAUSHOFER. (t.t.).

Cresswell, John W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.* SAGE Publications.

Darwich, M. (2018). The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status. *Insight Turkey, 20*(2). https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2018202.08

Fox, A. C. (2019). Conflict and the Need for a Theory of Proxy Warfare. *Journal of Strategic Security, 12*(1), 44–71. https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.12.1.1701

Herwig, H. H. (1999). Geopolitik: Haushofer, Hitler and Lebensraum. *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 22*(2-3), 218–241.

Human Development, I. (t.t.). *Country Profiles Yemen.*

Hussein, M., & Eryani, A. (2023). The Role of Foreign Companies In the Oil and Gas Industry of Yemen. *Badan Penelitian Internasional Federasi Rusia,* 120–121.

Israel ketir ketir, biaya pengapalan naik akibat serangan Houthi—ANTARA News. (t.t.). Diambil 7 Februari 2025, dari

https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3877893/israel-ketir-ketir-biaya-pengapalan-naik-akibat-serangan-houthi

Jacopo, L., & Mazzucco, M. (2024). Iran and The Houthis' Asymmetric Maritime Warfare Campaign In The Red Sea: A Study of The Sponsor-Proxy Model. *Journal for Iranian Studies, No.20*(20), 34–35.

Karakır, İ. A. (2018). Ongoing Conflict in Yemen: A Proxy War? *TESAM Akademi Dergisi, 5*(2), 121–149. https://doi.org/10.30626/tesamakademi.456008

Khursheed, A. (2025). Iran's Shadow in Yamen: Unpacking the Regional Implication. *Social Science Review Archives, 3*(2), 1176–1183. https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i2.709

Koshaimah, Y., & Zou, X. (2023). An Analysis of Yemen's Geostrategic Significance and Saudi-Iranian Competition for Regional Hegemony. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East, 10*(3), 251–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/23477989231176141

Lysa, C. (2023). Governing Refugees in Saudi Arabia (1948–2022). *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 42*(1), 25. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdac027

Mustofa, A. Z. (2023). Kepentingan China sebagai Aktor di Balik Rekonsiliasi Hubungan Arab Saudi dan Iran. *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik, 14*(2), 253–268. https://doi.org/10.14710/politika.14.2.2023.253-268

Nevola, L. (2023, January 17). *Beyond Riyadh: Houthi Cross-Border Aerial Warfare (2015-2022). ACLED.* https://acleddata.com/2023/01/17/beyond-riyadh-houthi-cross-border-aerial-warfare-2015-2022/

Nugraha, F. A., Sari, D. S., & Mubarak, K. Z. (2022). Bantuan Kemanusiaan UNICEF terhadap Anak-Anak terdampak Kelaparan dan Malnutrisi dalam Konflik Yaman. *TRANSBORDERS: International Relations Journal, 6*(1), 32–49.

Nugraha Hrp, M. O. (2018). Kepentingan Inggris Menjual Senjata ke Arab Saudi. *JOM FISIP, 5*(3).

Nurhakim, H. A. (2022). Proxy War dalam Konflik Yaman. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Sejarah, 18*(1).

Over 20,000 Migrants and Refugees Arrive in Horn of Africa from Yemen | International Organization for Migration. (t.t.). Diambil 7 Februari 2025, dari https://www.iom.int/news/over-20000-migrants-and-refugees-arrive-horn-africa-yemen

PDB per kapita Yaman | 1990-2024 Data | 2025-2027 Perkiraan. (2024).

Presiden Yaman Tinggalkan Istana di Kota Aden. (2015, March 26). VOA Indonesia. https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/presiden-yaman-tinggalkan-istana-di-aden/2694296.html

Priambodo, S. (2017). Motif Intervensi Arab Saudi Terhadap Perang Saudara di Yaman. *Jurnal Analisis Hubungan Internasional, 6*(1), 207–208.

Qiam-1. (t.t.). Missile Threat. Retrieved 7 February 2025, https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/qiam-1/

Rahman, S. (2019). Tensi Sektarianisme dan Tantangan Demokrasi di Timur Tengah Pasca Arab Spring. *Dialektika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Ilmu Sosial, 12*(2), 112–113. https://doi.org/10.33477/dj.v12i2.1116

Salloukh, B. F. (2013). The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East. *The International Spectator, 48*(2), 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2013.787830

Saudi Arabia (SAU) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners. (t.t.). The Observatory of Economic Complexity. Diambil 7 Februari 2025, dari https://oec.world/en/profile/country/sau

Saudi Aramco's Jeddah oil depot hit by Houthi attack | News | Al Jazeera. (t.t.). Diambil

7 Februari 2025, dari https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/25/saudi-aramco-jeddah-storage-facility-hit-by-attack

Setiawati, D., Rahayu, H. R., & Arbakafin, Y. (2023). Kondisi Umum dan Pemicu Terjadinya Pergolakan Yaman. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Humaniora dan Seni, 1*(2), 11–18. https://doi.org/10.62379/jishs.v1i2.473

Sihaloho, R. A. H., Prabowo, T. B., & Kusuma, R. P. (2022). Food Crisis in Yemen: The Roles of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) from 2015 to 2020. *Nation State: Journal of International Studies, 5*(1), 59–74. https://doi.org/10.24076/nsjis.v5i1.504

Soepandji, K. W. (2020). Geopolitik, Negara, dan Bangsa Masa Kini. *Jurnal Lemhannas RI, 7*(1), 41–58. https://doi.org/10.55960/jlri.v7i1.50

Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R&D.* Alfabeta, Bandung.

Taufiq, F., & Utama, L. W. P. (2018). Hegemoni Amerika Serikat Terhadap Arah Kebijakan Arab Saudi dalam Konflik Yaman Pasca Arab Spring 2011-2017. *Jurnal ICMES, 1*(1), 34. https://doi.org/10.35748/jurnalicmes.v1i1.2

Tim Harian Kompas. (2018, Juli 26). *Houthi Serang Tanker Saudi di Laut Merah.*

Tim Harian Kompas. (2019, September 15). *Kilang Aramco Diserang Houthi.*

Tyler Rogoway. (2016, Oktober). *Images Show A Badly Damaged HSV-2 Swift Following Attack Off Yemeni Coast.*

Bakry, U. S. (2019). *Metode Penelitian Hubungan Internasional.* Pustaka Pelajar.

UNICEF. (t.t.). *Yemen situation reports | UNICEF*. Diambil 7 Februari 2025, dari https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen/situation-reports

Van Slooten, S. (2019). The Strategic Alliance of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. *Student Paper, Kuwait Program at Sciences Po,(Spring 2019),* 20.

Volatility of The Yemeni Riyal (hlm. 1). (2020). Yemen Analysis Hub.

Yaman—PDB per kapita | 1990-2023 Data | 2024-2025 Perkiraan. (t.t.). Diambil 6 Februari 2025, dari https://id.tradingeconomics.com/yemen/gdp-per-capita

Yemen | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. (t.t.). Diambil 7 Februari 2025, dari https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/where-what/asia/yemen/en/

Zweiri, M. (2016). Iran and Political Dynamism in the Arab World: The Case of Yemen. *Digest of Middle East Studies, 25*(1), 10–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12078